

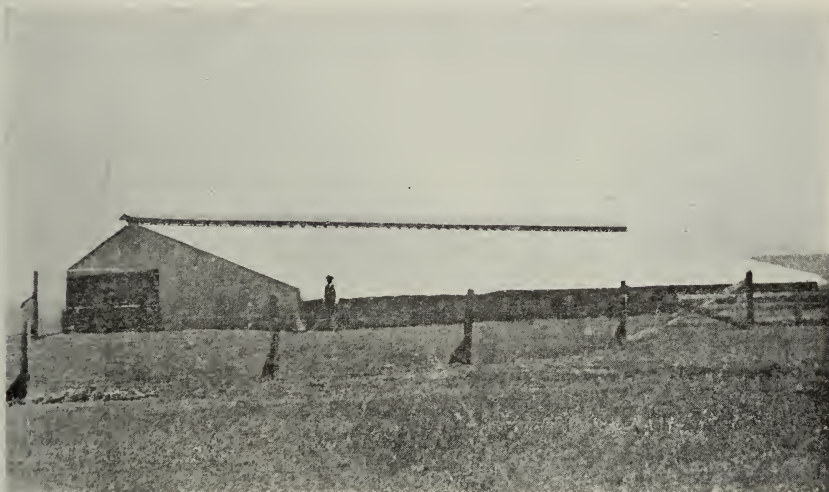
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LAMBING SHEDS

BY

R. F. MILLER AND G. E. FERMERY



Lambing barn, 80×96, constructed of corrugated iron. Capacity, 500 ewes.
Stanford Vina Ranch, Vina, Cal.

A great many lambs are annually lost at lambing time on the range due to exposure during storms or bad weather. With the present world shortage of food and material for clothing, it behooves the sheepmen to raise every lamb possible. One sheepman has said, "With lambs netting around \$5 per head it is time the sheepman should arrange to save every possible lamb or let someone in the business who will."

The desirability of lambing sheds is gradually being recognized by many sheepmen who formerly thought them impractical. In

Tehama County the manager of one extensive ranch where lambing barns have been used for a number of years, estimated that 40 to 50 per cent of his losses are eliminated by the use of barns. Another sheepman who formerly was prejudiced against the use of sheds, thinking it unwise to go among the flock and disturb the ewes, approves of the shed very highly after using it one year. His experience has been that after working among the sheep a few days they would quiet down, and when going among them even with a lantern at night they would hardly get out of the way. He seldom found it necessary to catch a ewe, but when she had dropped a lamb he would carry the lamb to a small pen by means of a hook and the ewe would follow.

CAUSES OF LOSSES AT LAMBING TIME

There are possibly three causes of loss in lambing range bands. First, storms or wet weather; Second, scarcity of feed; and third, varmints, chiefly coyotes. Storms cause by far the heaviest loss, as quite frequently a two- or three-day storm may be responsible for the death of 10 to 15 per cent of the lambs in a band when not protected. Oftentimes, sheepmen try to avoid storms by lambing late in the season, but even then the weather is uncertain. Newly born lambs need protection the first twenty-four hours. After that they can stand a great deal of exposure.

The second cause, scarcity of feed, can usually be controlled. It may seem costly to supply hay, but at present prices of lambs it is well warranted when grass is scarce. When ewes are poorly nourished they have little or no milk, and oftentimes will not claim their lambs. Again, when the milk flow is scant, the lambs will not do well, and may die for want of nourishment.

Coyotes are very bad in some sections, getting many lambs out in the open. By the use of sheds this loss might be partly eliminated, although it is not well to confine young lambs too much. By putting out lanterns, building fires, and shooting from time to time during the night, they may be kept off to some extent. The mere fact of using sheds will result in more careful attention to the flock in general.

WHERE SHEDS ARE DESIRABLE

The practicability of sheds is largely dependent on prevailing conditions. Where lambing is done in level country with no natural protection, lambing sheds are highly desirable. Grass is usually abundant in this case, and hay can also be easily hauled in. The

shed is a means of protecting the sheep from rain and storm, and while it may not be used every day, it is a means of saving lambs in time of a storm. On the other hand, when sheep are lambing in the foothills where natural protection is afforded and where it is difficult to get hay or feed to the shed, it may be inadvisable to construct a complete shed, but even in this case some temporary shelter would be helpful.

There is a third type of lambing ground that is not adapted to the use of sheds, viz., in the mountains where grass is scarce and drop bands travel probably one-half mile a day to get feed and where pack mules are the common means of transportation. In these sections lambing is usually late in the season, April and May, and the hills and ravines afford some natural protection, and a fair percentage of lambs is realized.

LOCATION

Drainage is of prime importance, and a lambing shed should be located on high sloping ground, preferably sandy soil. This cannot be over-emphasized in California where heavy rains are common during the winter and spring, and a muddy corral is one of the greatest objections to corralling sheep at lambing time. Sheep are more severely affected by being confined in muddy corrals than other stock, and they do not thrive under such conditions. Good grazing is necessary in the vicinity of the shed as sheep require green feed at lambing time to supply milk for the lambs. Furthermore, to feed grain or hay exclusively would prove very costly. Fresh water should be near at hand, although where rains are abundant water is usually available in sloughs or draws, and when getting green grass, sheep do not require much water. It is further quite desirable to have the shed sheltered by means of trees as a wind-break. This would add largely to the comfort of the sheep, but is not always possible.

Lastly, the location must be accessible with team and wagon so as to supply the needs of the men and shed in general.

TYPES OF SHELTER FOR LAMBING

- (a) Lambing barn.
- (b) Lambing shed with open front.
- (c) Movable panels and canvas roofing.
- (d) Sheltered lambing pens and corral.
- (e) Brush corral.

The central barn offers certain advantages as compared with the open shed.

1. The lambing barn is especially adapted to valley conditions where hay is fed at lambing time.
2. It offers more complete shelter, being enclosed on all four sides.
3. Time and labor required to feed and care for the ewes and lambs are less, as the sheep are in a more compact body.
4. Durability greater, as such a barn is usually more substantially



Fig. 1.—Lambing barn, 54 × 144, used by Spencer Ranch Co., Knights Landing, California. This company lambs 4000 ewes on alfalfa hay by the use of two barns of this type.

built than a shed. Heavy winds and driving rains are more easily withstood in a barn than a shed.

5. Feed storage and general arrangement are very practical. In a central barn the feed may be more conveniently stored than in a shed and the pens may be more conveniently arranged.

6. May be more serviceable: A central barn can oftentimes be more effectively arranged for a shearing shed by a few minor changes. As the lambing shed or barn is often used later in the season for shearing, it is desirable to have the pens so arranged as to make this change readily.

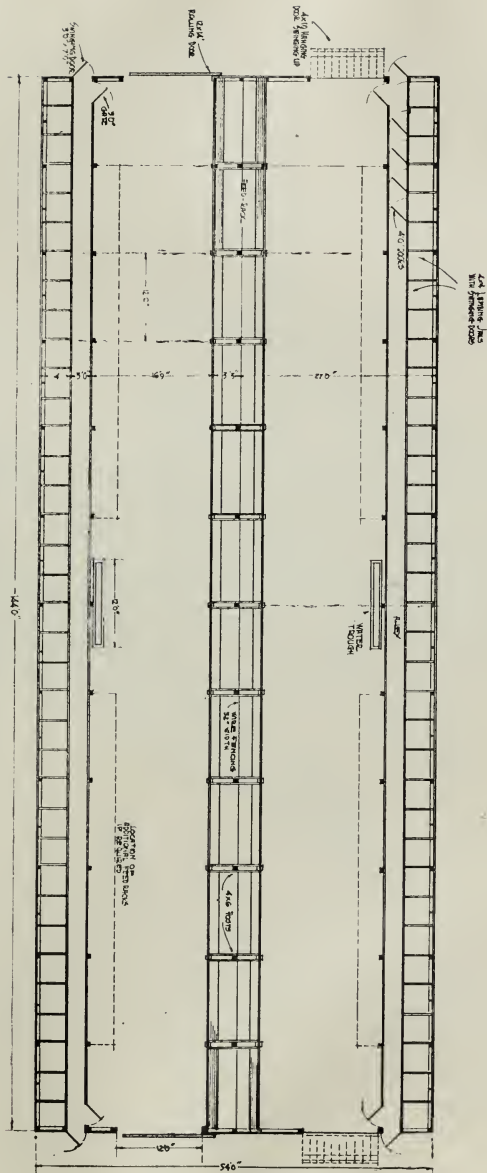


Fig. 2.—Plan of lambing barn.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF LAMBING BARN

This low-type gable-roof barn suitable for mild climate has been designed to provide a large sheltered area at a small cost. The barn is 54 feet wide and 144 feet long, with a clearance of 6 feet at the eaves and 20 feet 6 inches at the peak, and will house 1000 head of sheep. The sides are boarded up only four feet, thus allowing a continuous opening of two feet between studs for light and ventilation. Anyone working in the barn can also readily see when sheep are approaching the barn and when assistance is needed in penning

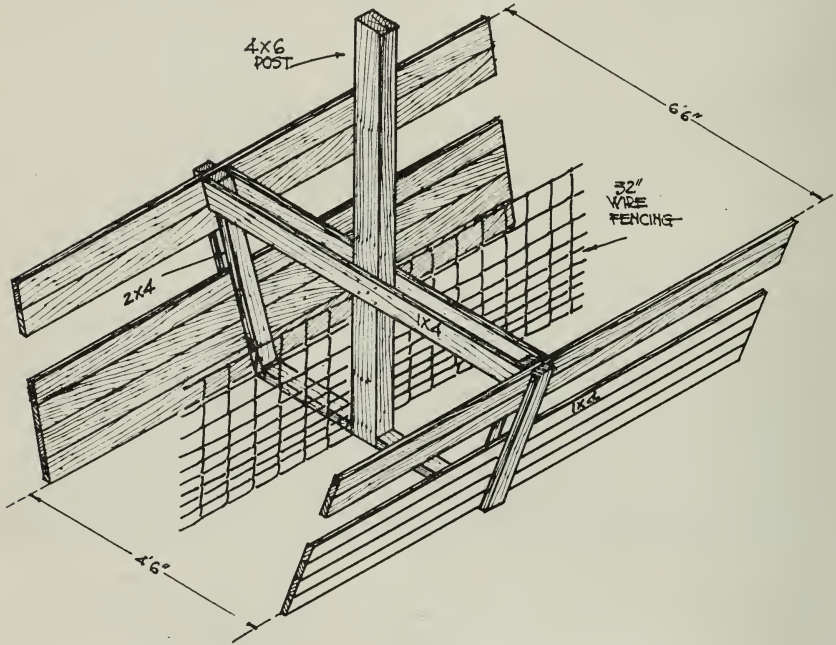


Fig. 3.—Detail of hay rack.

same. The siding consists of plain 1×12 inch pine boards laid vertically without battens. At each end of the barn a 12×14 foot rolling door is provided and the hay is fed by driving through the barn with a team and wagon. This is usually done during the day when the sheep are in the yards.

GROUND PLAN

A continuous feed rack running lengthwise through the center of the barn divides the barn into two compartments. As only one side of the barn is used in driving through with a team, the other side

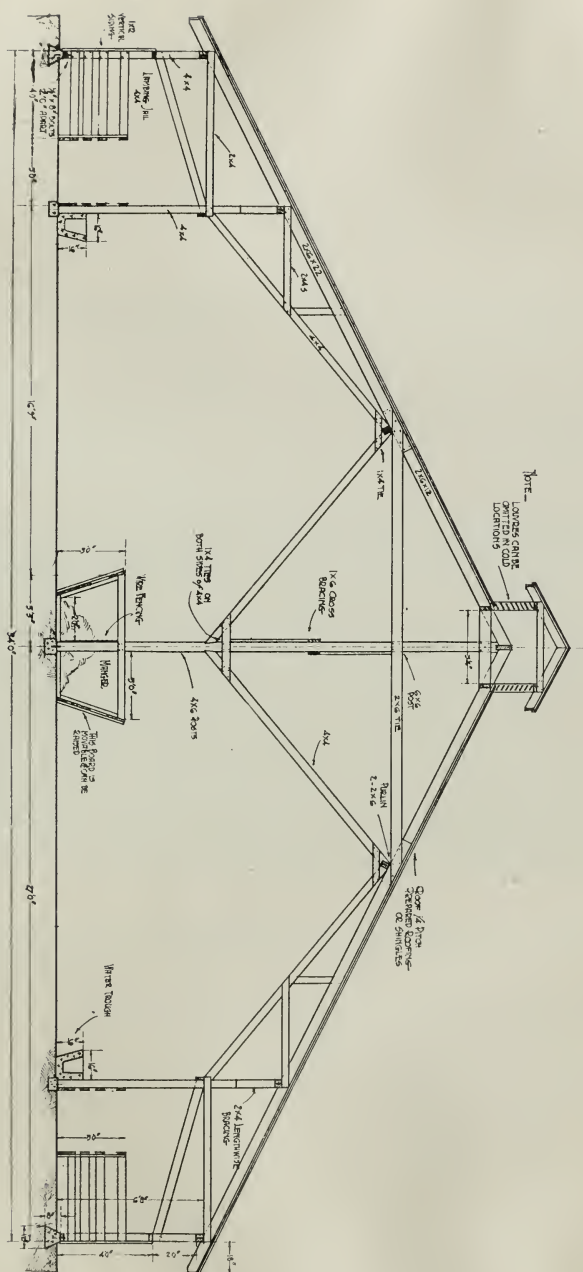


Fig. 4.—Cross-section of lambing barn.

may be partitioned into suitable pens. The feed rack is three feet high, six feet six inches wide at the top and four feet six inches wide at the bottom. A strip of 32-inch wire netting is stretched through the center of the rack to force the hay toward either side (Fig. 3).

There are thirty-six 4×4 foot lambing pens or "jails" along the wall on each side of the barn with a four-foot gate swinging out into a three-foot alley. These gates when open block the alley which facilitates putting a ewe and her lamb into a small pen. A twelve-foot concrete water trough with automatic level control is located on each side of the barn. The small pens are not provided with water although a continuous trough may be installed at the rear of the pens.

YARDS AND CORRALS

Suitable yards should be provided at each end of the barn for holding the sheep. A special entrance should be arranged leading up to the three-foot alley to facilitate penning a ewe and her lamb. Board fencing is usually preferable to wire fencing as it is more rigid and stands wear better. The fence should be 3½ feet high, the base board set on the ground and the next two boards spaced rather close together to prevent young lambs from crawling out and becoming separated from their mothers. A twelve or fourteen-foot gate is desirable at the entrance to avoid crowding.

LAMBING SHED WITH OPEN FRONT

In California where the winters are mild the open shed is perhaps the most common form of shelter used for sheep. Sheep are particularly adapted to the open outdoor life and can stand considerable severe weather.

ADVANTAGES OF THE OPEN SHED AS COMPARED WITH LAMBING BARN

1. Sheep have more freedom and liberty. The shed being open on one side allows the sheep to run in and out at will. Range sheep usually do better when not confined too closely.

2. Construction simple: Building a barn requires more skill and experience than putting up a shed. A barn requires a permanent foundation, door fittings are somewhat difficult, and more detail planning as to material is required.

3. Ventilation better in a shed: The shed being open on one side admits an abundance of air, while the closed barn is not always well ventilated. The importance of pure, fresh air cannot be over-emphasized as sheep are often confined in large numbers and the air readily becomes foul.

4. First cost is lower: Lambing having generally been done in the open without artificial shelter, the average sheepman is reluctant about putting up expensive structures for this purpose. The central barn is usually more complete and better equipped, which all adds to the cost. The open shed, on the other hand, may be cheaply constructed out of rough lumber.

5. Open shed most popular: On the majority of sheep ranges this type of shelter is commonly found and seems admirably adapted.



Fig. 5.—Lambing shed with open front, used by the G. W. Mills Estate, Slough House, Cal. The shed is located on a hillside and the yards are well drained.

DESCRIPTION OF LAMBING SHED

The shed is so planned as to give maximum protection from wind and rain. The main part of the shed is 240 feet long and 20 feet deep, running north and south, as the wind and rain storms in central California are commonly from the northeast and southwest. (This depends upon locality.) A wing extends on the south end, thirty feet or any length desired, and should be equipped with the small lambing pens or "jails." A similar wing may be added on the north end if required. The shed is six feet high in the back and eight feet high in front, thus allowing maximum shelter, and sufficient

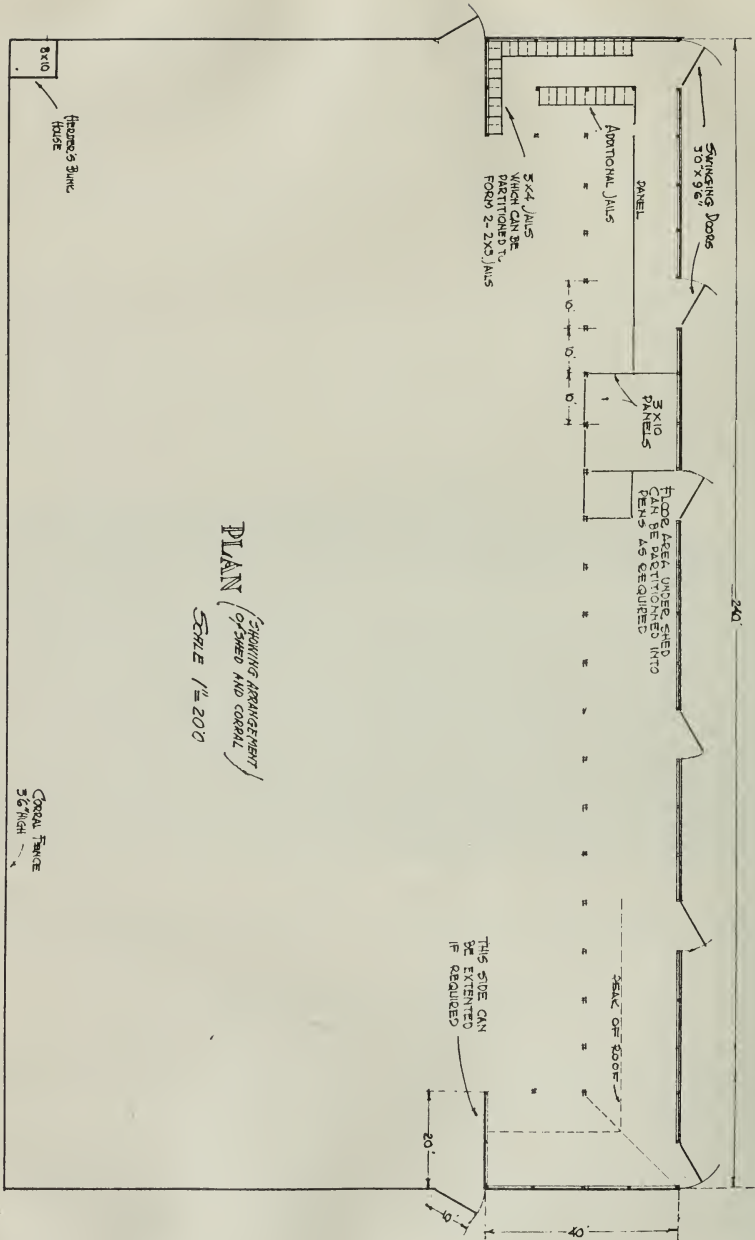


Fig. 6.—Ground plan of lambing shed.

room overhead to work conveniently. This also permits of cleaning out under the shed with team and scraper after the lambing season. The rear of the shed is equipped with ten-foot doors every forty feet. The posts or supports should be bevelled off for $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet above the ground so as to prevent any sharp corners that might injure the sheep.

The shed may be readily partitioned into pens of ten or twenty feet square with ten or twenty-foot panels. It can be subdivided

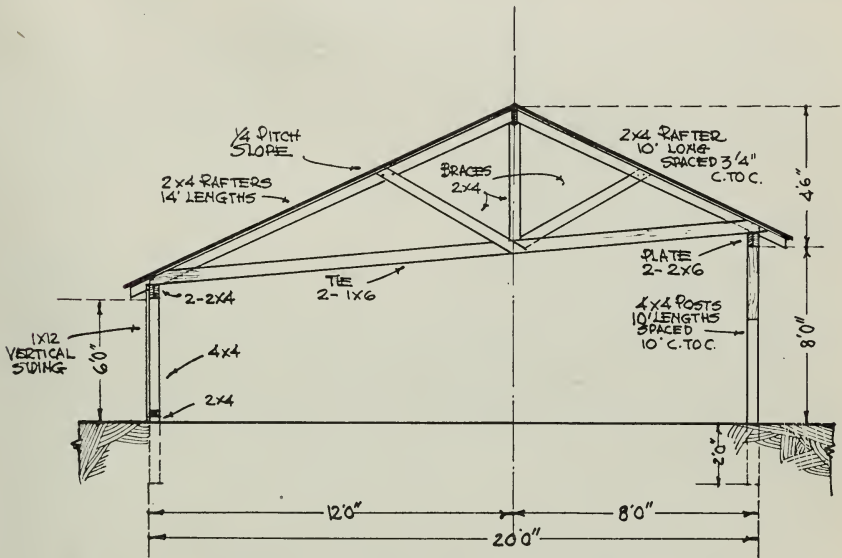


Fig. 7.—Cross-section of lambing shed.

in this way as required, and doors are provided in the back for letting the ewes and lambs out and separating them from the main band. The “jails” are properly 3×4 feet, and equipped with a self-locking door (Fig. 8). Occasionally it is necessary to supply additional “jails” and this can be done by means of a small three-foot panel, partitioning a 3×4 foot pen and making two pens 2×3 feet. The latter is especially convenient when forcing a ewe to adopt a strange lamb.

MOVABLE LAMBING PENS

When only temporary shelter is adapted, the lambing pen illustrated in figure 9 is very satisfactory wherever it has been tried. It is very simple and may be readily moved about from place to place by one man taking hold at each corner.

The pen consists of four shake panels sixteen feet long and three feet high which are set up and fastened at the corners by means of a piece of wood (self-locking). Baling wire is perhaps most com-

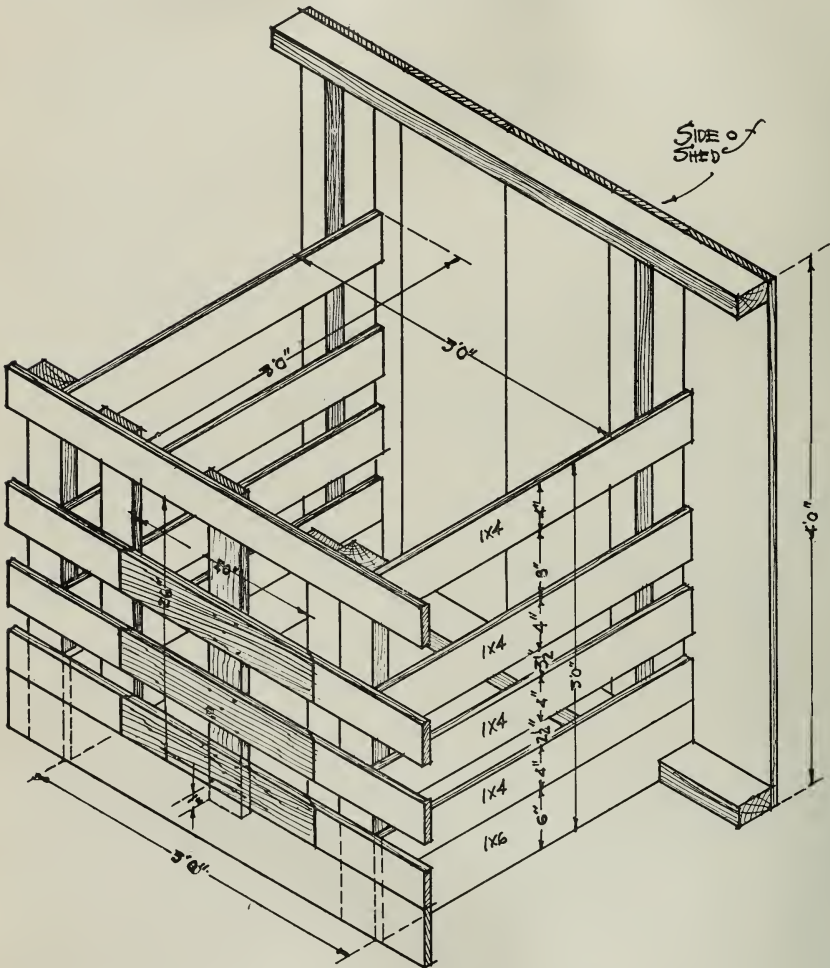


Fig. 8.—Typical lambing “jail” with self-locking door.

monly used for this purpose. A 2×2 foot ridgepole is supported in the center of the pen by means of 1×6 braced at the ends and a canvas 16×20 foot thrown over the top which may be tied down to the sides of the pen.

The panels alone serve as a wind break, and are generally used

without the canvas cover, but in case of a storm the canvas roof can be readily set up, and furnishes a very satisfactory shelter. These pens are very handy and may be readily transported, which is an important factor.

SHELTERED LAMBING PENS AND CORRALS

Another type of shelter for lambing is an ordinary corral equipped with sheltered "jails." Such a corral should be placed, if possible,



Fig. 9.—Movable lambing pen 16×16 feet. Very handy and extensively used by sheepmen.

on the leeward side of a grove of trees for protection from the wind. In addition to the "jails," pens made of sixteen-foot pine shake panels are very handy in which to place the stronger lambs and ewes. Again the corral may become very muddy and these pens made of sixteen-foot panels may be moved from day to day as needed. The ground should be sloping to insure good drainage.

BRUSH CORRAL

While this means of protection may seem crude, the party using the corral shown in figure 12 claims it is very satisfactory and the timber affords most perfect shelter. The corral fence is made by

piling up brush and putting in a gate for an entrance. It is located on a heavily timbered hillside and covers a large area. The shepherd is in a position to give the lambing ewes special attention, and the young lambs dropped during the night are held back the next morning and added to the lamb band.

HANDLING THE EWES AT LAMBING TIME

When using a barn or shed and two or three bands are to be lambed, it is usually desirable to "bag" the ewes, that is, taking out all those that are advanced in gestation. This is best done by pen-

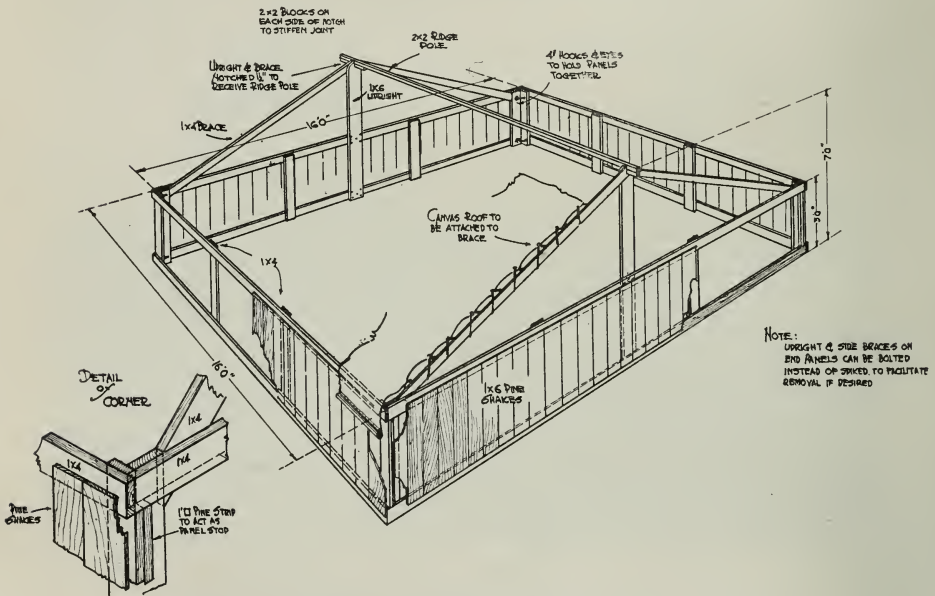


Fig. 10.—Perspective drawing of movable lambing pen.

ning up the sheep and inspecting the ewes, and any whose udders are beginning to fill are given a chalk mark. The entire band is then run through a chute and the marked ewes separated from the rest. This is done every week or as often as necessary and in that way the ewes lambing can be given better attention and in the end the dry ewes remain behind. Also, a given barn or shed will accommodate three or four times as many ewes by working them in rotation.

The drop band is usually brought into the barn or shed at night and fed hay, although if green feed is plentiful hay is not necessary. Sheepmen, as a rule, prefer to delay hay feeding as long as possible



Fig. 11.—Sheltered lambing pens and corrals. Natural protection and drainage ideal.



Fig. 12.—A brush corral. Cheap and quite effective shelter, but not always available.

as the ewes stop rustling and depend entirely on barn feeding after it has once begun. During stormy weather the ewes are brought to the barn and fed hay. A night man is employed and when a lamb is dropped the ewe and lamb are properly cared for. Twin lambs are placed in small pens with their mother for a day or two, while ewes with strong single lambs are usually placed in pens with other ewes that have just lambed.

During the day the sheep are out in the field, and any ewes that drop lambs are left until night when they are brought into the barn and properly cared for. When a ewe loses her lamb she is made to adopt the twin of another by being confined in a "jail." When a ewe has but little milk for her lamb, the lamb is allowed to suck another ewe that has an abundance of milk, once a day until the lamb gains strength.

The shepherd has many little details to look after at this time.